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Symposium Highlights: What, Exactly, Is a “Post-White” America?

SYMPOSIUM HIGHLIGHTS: WHAT, EXACTLY, IS A “POST-WHITE” AMERICA?

By M. Coleen Wilson¹

On March 23, 2011, *The Modern American* hosted its annual Spring Symposium at American University Washington College of Law. The symposium, entitled “Minority Majority: The Social and Legal Implications of a Post-White America,” questioned the possibility of a post-racial America. Minority groups are poised to become the majority in America by the year 2050, marking an end to nearly 300 years of a white majority. Moderated by Professor Pamela Bridgewater,² the panel was comprised of Horace Cooper,³ Jumana Musa,⁴ and Professor Lia Epperson.⁵

The panelists started the discussion by analyzing the concept of a “minority majority” and what it means to be “post-racial.” A symposium attendee proposed that the label “post-racial” is itself a fallacy, and asserted that modern conversations about race in America have become proxies for much-needed conversations about class. All the panelists agreed that discussions regarding race are not necessarily substitutes or diversions for dialogues about class.

Panelist Musa acknowledged the error in classifying America as “post-racial” merely because “the other” surpasses white Americans in population alone. Musa opined, racial and ethnic minorities in America have disparate experiences, viewing them collectively as a “supergroup” demeans their individual experiences. Professor Epperson suggested that these groups’ histories of subordination necessitate a call for coalition-building.

The panel also discussed how other societies have dealt with such changes throughout history in order to gauge how Americans will react to this change. Parallels were drawn between South Africa and the United States, with the panelists agreeing that America’s unique history makes this current crossroads

inherently different. This acknowledgment prompted one symposium attendee to question whether there is any merit to the argument that a White majority is needed to hold America together by acting as an “ethnic referee” and keeper of the peace. Panelist Musa dismissed this assertion, stating that this belief is based on the false perception of there being only one type of white American, much like racial and ethnic minorities do not have one cohesive identity.

The program quickly turned to a discussion on the need for social programs in a post-racial America. A symposium attendee voiced her concerns about using the “myth of a post-racial America” as a tool to discontinue programs and policies that were established to counteract the effects of social disparities.

The panel closed on a pensive note with one symposium attendee noting that, while it is debatable whether we are on a trajectory toward a post-racial America, at least we are all privileged to have a voice in an era where being “post-racial” is even a possibility.

Endnotes

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